

## B24 LIBERATOR - (Lady Jane) CRASH NORWICH 24/Nov/1944 – CITY RAILWAY STATION MARSHALLING YARD.

It appears from the accident reports that the a/c was carrying out instrument landing practice to runway 05 at Horsham St Faith (now Norwich International) , I do not remember this runway being used very much during WW2 as runway 35 was somewhat longer and the landing approach in those days was mainly over fields from either the Costessey or Wroxham directions. The centre line of the 05 runway would mean a southerly landing approach over much of the city centre from the Trowse/Lakenham area which would take it in roughly a straight line over St Johns Cathedral and then over St Philips Church on Heigham Road.

The limited Information and witness statements regarding this crash appear rather misleading as some refer to fog and that the a/c was flying normally after hitting St Philips Church tower in Heigham Road. At the time of the crash I was actually standing on Dereham road approximately 500 yards from, and facing the junction of Heigham Road and Old Palace road when the a/c came into my view. I do not remember there being any fog about as mentioned in some of the witness statements but there was low cloud as this was all lit up by a huge red glow when the a/c crashed.

One of the American officers' reports mentioned that he saw the a/c at approx. 200 feet and doing a steep turn somewhere over Mill Hill Road which presumably would have placed it north of St Johns Cathedral and then in line to St Phillips Church. If this was correct with the Cathedral tower being 135ft high and standing on a high part of Norwich the a/c would not have had much clearance. As the a/c did not hit the Cathedral it is not known how or why it became even lower to hit St Philips tower which was only 80ft high and he also mentions fog coming from the river but this was probably the red glow he saw after the aircraft had crashed as the river was approximately 200 yards beyond the crash site. Also after hitting the St Philips church tower (which was located in Heigham Road) he said it was flying normally but in a slight climb and did not see any damage.

*I never saw any fog on that day and I had a clear view of the a/c immediately after it hit the church. The Officer certainly would not have seen any damage to the a/c after it hit the church as this was on the starboard side and the a/c was then flying sideways.*

The second officer was also at the bottom of Mill Hill Road which was approximately 200 yards from the church. In his report he mentions the a/c was in a steep turn and slipping to the left with the wings vertical to the ground and after momentarily losing sight of it he saw the a/c skimming the house tops.

*I have no idea where this Officer could have seen the aircraft with wings vertical to the ground prior to the a/c hitting the church as they must have been parallel when it hit the tower and lost around 20 ft of the starboard wing and then immediately gone into a very steep climb flying sideways. He must have meant the wings were vertical when he saw the aircraft stall and go into a spin.*

*Why the a/c was flying around so low while practicing instrument landings I do not know as I would have thought it would or should have been flying straight and level towards the 05 runway from around the Trowse area. At the time of the accident I was looking after my brother outside a small grocery shop on the corner of Charles Street and Dereham Road which was approximately 500 yards from the junction of Heigham Road and Old Palace road. I suddenly saw this large B24 suddenly appear over that junction at no more than 200 feet in an exceptionally steep climbing attitude which I would put at around 40° minimum. I had never seen any bomber aircraft at such a steep angle as from my position I had a clear view of the upper surface of the wings and fuselage and could see a large portion of the wing and most of the starboard aileron and wing were missing.*

*It was not flying normally after hitting the church it was actually flying sideways as it crossed over Heigham Road/ Dereham Road junction and all four engines were working but although it was in a steep climb attitude it was not actually climbing. Within seconds the a/c stalled and the starboard wing dropped and the a/c went into a one and a half turn spin before disappearing from my sight. From where I was situated I had assumed that the B24 had crashed onto all the houses at the Heigham Street end of Old Palace road. However it was not until the next day that we found out that it had fortuitously crashed on the only piece of open space at the end of the Barker Street cul de sac which happened to be the City Railway Station marshalling area. **The original Station Marshalling area is now the industrial area of the existing Barker street which now goes from Heigham Street to the Barn Road roundabout***

*The cause of the crash was given as "weather" but I would say that it should have been "pilot error"*

*There is a plaque somewhere on Barkers Street commemorating this crash saying that the pilot took evasive action to stop the a/c from crashing on the many houses. It was a nice thought but unfortunately from my viewpoint the pilot had no control over the a/c after it hit the church.*

Ray Fisher 2020